



News Release

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The Utah Department of Health Announces Dr. Robert Rolfs as the New State Epidemiologist

(Salt Lake City, UT) – The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) is pleased to announce that Robert Rolfs, M.D., M.P.H., has accepted the position of the State Epidemiologist. Dr. Rolfs has been the Acting State Epidemiologist since March 2001 when former State Epidemiologist, Craig Nichols, retired.

Dr. Rolfs came to the UDOH in 1993 after working at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the Division of Sexually Transmitted Disease Prevention. He has held a variety of leadership positions including, most recently, the UDOH's Director of the Center for Health Data, which oversees the offices of Public Health Assessment, Health Care Statistics and Vital Records and Statistics. Data collected and managed by these offices include birth, death, infant death, marriage, divorce, and abortion certificates, hospital and emergency department discharge, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Health Status Survey, and Health Plan Performance. Although he will be leaving the UDOH's Center for Health Data he will consult on health data projects and plans to use his background to infuse a more analytical approach to epidemiology.

“We are excited to have Dr. Rolfs’ dual focus – his analytical skills and epidemiologic knowledge and experience. Together this combination will benefit additional UDOH programs such as those that deal with chronic disease,” said Dr. Richard Melton, Deputy Director, UDOH.

In Dr. Rolfs’ State Epidemiologist position he will oversee the Bureau of Epidemiology, which includes the areas of infectious disease and environmental epidemiology. He will also coordinate epidemiologic work in other areas of the Department, focusing initially on chronic disease epidemiology. He hopes to build on the work that state and local public health implemented to respond to Utah’s Anthrax hoaxes and suspected cases as

Page 2 of 2 - The Utah Department of Health Announces Dr. Robert Rolfs as the New State Epidemiologist

“Ever since September 11 the role of an epidemiologist became more challenging and time sensitive – our infectious disease investigations have gone from days to hours,” said Dr. Rolfs. “It is a different mindset to prepare for a human opponent who might stage a bioterrorism attack than to prepare and respond to naturally occurring disease outbreaks. We are now considered a ‘first responder’ in an act of bioterrorism... which of course is also an act of war. This makes public health an integral part of the public safety network.”

Another goal in his new position is to work more closely with Utah’s 12 local health departments to develop a seamless, statewide disease prevention, identification and response network. “Dr. Rolfs has the foresight needed to lead Utah in epidemiology efforts, especially in light of possible bioterrorism threats and the need to have a comprehensive disease monitoring system to identify unusual disease outbreaks. He cares about the health of the community and under his leadership public health will benefit,” says Ilene Risk, Epidemiologist, Salt Lake Valley Health Department.

In addition to Dr. Rolfs’ work at the UDOH, he treats needy patients one morning per week at the Wasatch Homeless Health Care Program. He recently received an Appreciation for Dedicated Volunteerism Award from Senator Hatch for his work at the clinic.

Dr. Rolfs is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame, BS, 1976; Northwestern University Medical School, MD, 1980; University of Washington School of Public Health, Master of Public Health, 1998; Internal Medicine Residency, University of Cincinnati Medical Center, 1980-83; Academic General Internal Medicine Fellowship, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, 1983-85; Epidemic Intelligence Service, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1986-1988.

Dr. Rolfs is available for on-camera, radio and phone interviews on Thursday, April 18, 2002, from Noon to 2 p.m. To arrange an interview, contact Jana Kettering at 801-538-6339. A photo of Dr. Rolfs is also available.